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### Abstract

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom Bombadil is usually viewed as either a silly and unimportant interruption or as a character with only a very minor function, but certainly not as a character of importance like Gandalf. Recently, scholars have shown the importance of laughter and humor in J.R.R. Tolkien's works. This essay continues the discussion by showing how Bombadil is important and necessary to the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* as an embodiment of joy, and more broadly demonstrates the essential revivifying importance of joy to the entire tale.

### Additional Keywords

Joy in *The Lord of the Rings*; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Tom Bombadil—As symbol of Joy

# FEARLESS JOY: TOM BOMBADIL'S FUNCTION IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

ROBERT B. CHAPMAN-MORALES

AFTER A PERIOD OF ENLIGHTENMENT and of belief in progress and human achievement, the chaos and death caused by two world wars led many to find existence to be meaningless and futile. Authors turned to fiction to sort through the trauma they had seen or experienced. While most looked at the pointlessness of death in warfare, J.R.R. Tolkien and the Inklings looked at what could be gleaned from the devastation of war. The Inklings, and Tolkien, believed "that even ultimate defeat does not turn right into wrong" (Shippey 120) and this belief grounded the works of these authors and helped them define heroism as resistance to evil, holding on to moral values and looking to providence for purpose and direction. At the root of Tolkien's belief, the root of what kept Tolkien from turning to despair like other post-war authors, was his belief that one should always have courage and hope, even in the darkest of situations. But in order to resist and have courage and hope, one must hold onto joy as a light to dispel the darkness. Readers of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* do not fail to praise, admire, and love the courage and hope that is present in the story. Most also notice a providential force guiding Frodo to complete his quest. However, what is usually not fully appreciated is the comic joy present in the story. Furthermore, most scholars neglect Tom Bombadil, believing him to be a silly, unimportant addition to the story. While some scholars discuss the importance of laughter and humor to the story and note Bombadil's importance through his merriment and cheer, they do not fully appreciate his fundamental position in shaping Frodo's character. Bombadil shows the power of joy in a quest that will provoke Frodo's darkest feelings of despair. Bombadil is the nexus of joy in *The Lord of the Rings* and teaches the hobbits how to use joy to overcome the shadow of Mordor, the shadow of despair. Thus, we need to re-evaluate the importance of joy in the story to see that Bombadil is one of the most important characters Frodo meets.

To begin to understand Bombadil's importance in the story, one must also understand an important idea for Tolkien: *Eucatastrophe*. In his essay, "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien coins the term and defines it as

a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. (153)

Tolkien shows here the fundamental idea that shaped his literature: one must always resist evil for one never knows when a joyous turn of events will arise. Tolkien capitalizes "Joy," showing the importance he found in this sacred concept, but also in the emotion in general, an emotion that can be "fleeting" but also "poignant as grief" giving a "glimpse" of what lies "beyond the walls of the world." L. Eugene Startzman affirms the importance of *eucatastrophe* and joy in *The Lord of the Rings* and sees certain characters, such as Bombadil, Goldberry, and Galadriel, as embodiments of this idea of unexpected joy. Jennifer Raimundo, too, shows the importance of joy in Tolkien's works and examines the source: "Goodness, that essential quality derived from a perspective larger than selfish gain and a realization of a higher story greater than our own, is the fount from which mirth's might flows" (84). Raimundo shows us, first, that we must look beyond just the characters in the story and instead look for "a higher story." Second, she shows us that joy allows heroes and characters in a story to have hope. They deny a "universal final defeat" because they hold onto this joy of what lies beyond Middle-earth, beyond "selfish gain:" the "higher story," the larger destiny Tolkien had in mind.

The idea that ultimately all evil will be turned to good is this larger destiny. This is the "Joy beyond the walls of the world." Yet, Tolkien, having lived through two world wars, knew that in times of darkness and despair it could be difficult to believe in joy. However, evil will not have the last word and Tolkien enforces this idea of joy in the power of good through his writings. Tom Shippey helps us see that to Tolkien,

evil cannot itself create, that it was not in itself created (but sprang from a voluntary exercise of free will by Satan, Adam and Eve, to separate themselves from God), that it will in the long run be annulled or eliminated, as the Fall of Man was redressed by the Incarnation and death of Christ. Views like these are strongly present in *The Lord of the Rings*. (140-141)

These ideas inform Tolkien's larger destiny for the land of his stories: everything that is evil in Middle-earth can and will one day be unmade as it is not part of the original Creation. Alastair Whyte uses laughter to show this concept: "The utterance of laughter by the evil only serves as a reminder of its intrinsic

grounding in goodness" (55). Whyte also says "that evil is subordinate to good despite appearances, and that in the fullness of time change will bring about the victory of good" (55). Whyte brings up an idea to be further explored: evil may *appear* to have all the power, but in fact, evil can only imitate even in the expression of joy. With this knowledge, one can hope and believe in the ultimate victory of good and experience "Joy beyond the walls of the world" that is the source of Bombadil's comic joy.

We also see how Joy is fundamental to Tolkien's mythology in *The Silmarillion*. As Whyte says when describing Tulkas and Melkor, "Tulkas' laughter takes the evil of Melkor and finds in it joy in the ultimate triumph of good, and so it presents Tolkien's entire theodicy" (46). This establishes that "joy in the ultimate triumph of good" is fundamental to Tolkien's mythology and is the source of hope during the seemingly dark events of Middle-earth. Furthermore, as Whyte shows, laughter is an expression of this joy in evil's powerlessness to achieve future victory. Joy gives power to those who know that ultimate victory belongs to the side of goodness. Thus, expressing joy is a form of defiance to evil, and as the nexus of joy, Bombadil can teach Frodo this important form of resisting evil.

With a proper understanding of the key role that joy plays in the creation and destiny of Middle-earth, one can now start to see Bombadil's importance. Tolkien states that in *The Lord of the Rings*,

Tom Bombadil is not an important person—to the narrative. I suppose he has some importance as a 'comment' [...]. [H]e represents something that I feel important, though I would not be prepared to analyze the feeling precisely. I would not, however, have left him in, if he did not have some kind of function. (*Letters* 178, #144)

Tolkien admits that he would not "have left [Bombadil] in if he did not have some kind of function." Bombadil "represents something [...] important" and with joy as an important *feeling* for Tolkien, we begin to see Bombadil's function in the story: to give comment to Tolkien's belief in the ultimate power of expressing joy in the face of evil.

One reason scholars often misunderstand Bombadil's function is because they misunderstand the answer to Frodo's question to Goldberry: "'Tell me, if my asking does not seem foolish, who is Tom Bombadil?'" Goldberry responds, "'He is, as you have seen him [...]. He is the Master of wood, water, and hill'" (*The Lord of the Rings* [LotR] I.7.124). Some critics want to argue that he is a God-figure from the statement "He is." They would argue this using the form "I am." However, we can look to another letter from Tolkien to find this is not the case. Tolkien says:

As for Tom Bombadil, I really do think you are being too serious, besides missing the point. [...] Frodo has asked not 'what is Tom Bombadil' but 'Who is he'. [...] We need not go into the sublimities of 'I am that am' – which is quite different from *he is*. [Goldberry] adds as a concession a statement of part of the 'what'. He is *master* in a peculiar way: he has no fear, and no desire of possession or domination at all. He merely knows and understands about such things as concern him in his natural little realm. (*Letters* 191-92, #153, italics in original)

Tolkien reminds us that the scene does not ask or answer the important question of "[W]hat is Tom Bombadil" but "Who is he." Bombadil "is *master* in a peculiar way: he has no fear, and no desire of possession or domination at all." This fearlessness as part of *who* Bombadil is, along with his characteristic of "*master* in a peculiar way" can point us to *what* he is. Bombadil is a master in his fearlessness and will teach the hobbits how to become fearless, too. To become fearless, the hobbits must become like Bombadil: allowing joy to create in themselves a setting in which fear and terror have no power: to simply accept one's position and be content in it, no matter how difficult it is, taking joy in the fact that all troubles and trials are temporary and that good will triumph in the end.

Tolkien shows us that Bombadil's existence is tied to the fate of Middle-earth and the quest to destroy the Ring, a quest that will rely on the joyous courage of the fellowship. When speaking of the consequences of not destroying the Ring, Tolkien says, "Ultimately only the victory of the West will allow Bombadil to continue, or even to survive. Nothing would be left for him in the world of Sauron" (*Letters* 179, #144). One might argue that this shows Bombadil to be nothing more than a prop character, a physical representation of the pastoral and dependent on that setting for his survival. If the Old Forest is destroyed, Bombadil too is destroyed. As Tolkien describes it, if the West were to fail, the natural world, the world of Creation, would not survive. As we see with Mordor, Sauron and evil does seem to have a certain power to mask and alter. Tolkien even seems to suggest that it has the power to destroy the natural world. In *The Silmarillion*, we see the necessity for action if beauty is to survive. When the Valar enter Middle-earth,

they were at first astounded and at a loss, for it was as if naught was yet made which they had seen in vision, and all was but on point to begin and yet unshaped, and it was dark. For the Great Music had been but the growth and flowering of thought in the Timeless Halls, and the Vision only a foreshowing; but now they had entered in at the beginning of Time, and the Valar perceived that the World had been but foreshadowed and foresung, and they must achieve it. (*Silmarillion* 20)

Thus, in order for good to triumph, for all evil to be turned to the glory of Ilúvatar, action is required and the Valar, along with the later inhabitants of Middle-earth, must work to “achieve it.” This creates a dramatic context in which failure is possible *if* no one fights for the light, and it also shows that defeat would be the end of Bombadil and the end of Middle-earth. During the Council of Elrond, Glorfindel says, “I think that in the end, if all else is conquered, Bombadil will fall, Last as he was First; and then Night will come” (*LotR* II.2.266). From this, we have evidence that Bombadil came “First” in Middle-earth and that he will presumably be “Last.” After that, Middle-earth will be no more and “Night will come,” capitalized to signify the darkness of the Void outside the walls of the world. Thus, without Bombadil, without the joy that he embodies more than any other character, there can be no hope for Middle-earth. The Valar would live on with the knowledge of their failure to “achieve” the “Vision,” but Bombadil, and Middle-earth, would be no more. Therefore, the hobbits must learn the fearlessness of being joyous that Bombadil will teach them if they are to save Middle-earth from complete destruction.

From this, we can discount the idea that Bombadil is one of the Valar. Gene Hargrove argues that Tom Bombadil is the Vala, Aulë, who decides to live in Middle-earth. We are told in *The Silmarillion* that, “Of the fabric of Earth had Aulë thought, to whom Ilúvatar had given skill and knowledge scarce less than to Melkor; but the delight and pride of Aulë is in the deed of making, and in the thing made, and neither in possession nor in his own mastery” (19). As a result, Hargrove’s argument seems convincing, and seems to fit Bombadil’s character well. Paul W. Lewis, in his article connecting Beorn and Tom Bombadil, agrees with Hargrove that Bombadil could be the Vala, Aulë. While both Hargrove and Lewis help establish Bombadil’s possible connection to the larger mythology and the connection between Bombadil and the natural world to Aulë’s love for creation and the natural world, they do not fully take into account Aulë’s creation: the dwarves. If Bombadil was Aulë, it would seem he would be more concerned with his creation, the dwarves, whereas the evidence we have is that Bombadil is not concerned with any of the races of Middle-earth, other than the hobbits he encounters. Lewis suggests the reason for Bombadil’s disinterest in the dwarves is because Aulë gives them to Ilúvatar, but this does not fully take into account that even after Aulë gives the dwarves to Ilúvatar, he still is interested in them. Furthermore, both Lewis and Hargrove fail to adequately account for Bombadil’s simple appearance if he is in fact Aulë. We are told that the Valar, “because they were drawn into the World by love of the Children of Ilúvatar, for whom they hoped, they took shape after that manner which they had beheld in the Vision of Ilúvatar, save only in majesty and splendour” (*Silmarillion* 21). The Valar would take the form of “majesty and splendour” and it can be agreed that Bombadil does not match this description: he is simple and

rustic. In addition, the connection with the hobbits, a race that admires and respects creation and the natural world, shows him not to be Aulë, but instead to be a simple, yet powerful, joyous creature, able to work on the hobbits' love for the natural world to foster in them fearless joy.

Bombadil himself further solidifies this idea of *what* he is when we examine his answer to *who* he is. Frodo asks, "Who are you, Master?" (Tolkien, *LotR* I.7.131). This shows not only that Frodo looks to Bombadil as 'Master,' like all characters who come in contact with him, but also suggests an importance even beyond a character like Gandalf or Elrond who are never called "Master." Bombadil comes out of deep thought and answers Frodo with,

Eh, what? [...] Don't you know my name yet? That's the only answer. Tell me, who are you, alone, yourself and nameless? But you are young and I am old. Eldest, that's what I am. Mark my words, my friends: Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving. He was here before Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless—before the Dark Lord came from Outside. (*LotR* I.7.131)

Bombadil is "Eldest," capitalized to show that he is older than all living beings. He saw everything: he knows the history of all of Middle-earth. This means that he was the very first being in Middle-earth. Furthermore, as Michael Treschow and Mark Duckworth tell us, "The Dark Lord that Tom mentions here is not Sauron but Morgoth, Sauron's Master, the character of Satan in Tolkien's mythology" (184). Here we see Bombadil fixated to a point *before* Morgoth, a time before war and despair when joy came easily. However, Treschow and Duckworth say,

Bombadil is the embodiment of an idea. [...] All further attempts to square his identity with Tolkien's larger mythology may at times be interesting, but are really beside the point. [...] Tolkien himself felt that such speculations were not helpful. Christopher Tolkien, in his publications of his father's notes and drafts, has wisely not attempted to go further than what his father said. (191)

Perhaps it may not seem "wise" to go beyond what Tolkien says of Bombadil. Yet, as we saw earlier, Tolkien admitted to a "function" for Bombadil, one he was not prepared to "analyze," and in order to find that "function," we must disagree with this idea that pinning Bombadil to the larger mythology is "beside the point." Bombadil is called "Master" by Frodo and then we have a reference



to Morgoth who Treschow and Duckworth remind us is “Sauron’s *Master* (my emphasis).” Bombadil is thus set in a specific context directly opposed to Morgoth, to the darkness and despair that he represents. Bombadil was there amidst the darkness, showing that in order to be “fearless” he would have to be something greater than darkness: the light of joy. Therefore, he is the light of joy who teaches the hobbits how to create one’s own light in times of darkness and despair by expressing joy, the fearless joy required to overcome Sauron.

The hobbits start their quest with a joy in the natural world, but they must learn to focus their joy in times of danger and despair. Frodo first meets Bombadil in danger, and Tom’s joyous indifference to danger is the first lesson Frodo must learn. Critics generally accept Bombadil to be a character who emphasizes the importance of the natural world. In one of Tolkien’s letters, he writes, “Do you think Tom Bombadil, the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside, could be made into the hero of a story?” (*Letters* 26, #19). This leads most to see Bombadil as representative of the natural world, “the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside.” Yet this is only part of his character. The other part of Bombadil’s character is his joy. As the hobbits enter the Old Forest, we learn that this ancient forest has grown angry with the abuse it has seen from those desiring to control what is not for them to control. Merry says, “But the Forest *is* queer. Everything in it is very much more alive, more aware of what is going on, so to speak, than things are in the Shire. And the trees do not like strangers. They watch you” (*LotR* I.6.110). The Old Forest is an ancient setting of danger and despair. Yet in this setting exists Bombadil: the happiest, most joyful character who is fearless because he is immune to the effects of despair. The hobbits eventually fall victim to the forest, and Old Man Willow captures Merry and Pippin. Into the midst of this danger comes Tom Bombadil. The first thing we learn about him is that he is joyful and sings for no apparent reason. Frodo and Sam hear him sing:

*Hey dol! merry dol! ring a dong dillow!  
Ring a dong! hop along! fal lal the willow!  
Tom Bom, jolly Tom, Tom Bombadillo! (LotR I.6.119)*

It seems like nonsense words, but that is exactly the point. It is believed that one must always be serious in serious situations, but Bombadil comes along to show that one must be jolly and hold to one’s happiness even in dark situations. By being joyful, one takes away the power and terror of evil and despair.

Our first description of Bombadil after his singing shows his physical representation of joy. Tom is always singing cheerfully, and yet he is also able to save the hobbits from Old Man Willow simply by commanding him to let them go (*LotR* I.6.120). In this first encounter with Bombadil, we learn, like the

hobbits, that joy and jollity does not equate to weakness or softness. Instead, it is necessary amidst a world of danger. This joy is also known by the hobbits who take delight in their simple, pastoral life, yet it needs to be refined. Bombadil shows the hobbits that they must keep this type of fearless joy on their journey. When he rescues the hobbits on their first real venture out of the Shire:

There was another burst of song, and then suddenly, hopping and dancing along the path, there appeared above the reeds an old battered hat with a tall crown and a long blue feather stuck in the band. With another hop and a bound there came into view a man, or so it seemed. At any rate he was too large and heavy for a hobbit, if not quite tall enough for one of the Big People, though he made noise enough for one, stumping along with great yellow boots on his thick legs, and charging through grass and rushes like a cow going down to drink. He had a blue coat and a long brown beard; his eyes were blue and bright, and his face was red as a ripe apple, but creased into a hundred wrinkles of laughter. In his hands he carried on a large leaf as on a tray a small pile of white water-lilies. (*LotR* I.6.119)

Importantly, Bombadil appears amidst song, dancing into view in a scene that not only shows his connection to the natural world, but also his relation to joy and cheer. His description is one of childlike simplicity and play and as readers we cannot help but laugh for joy at his appearance amidst a nonsense song. This puts us in the right mindset to understand the power of expressing joy in the midst of danger and darkness. Bombadil's "wrinkles of laughter" show us that the embodiment of joy would be someone who laughs so much he has wrinkles and is dressed in happy bright colors reminiscent of the pastoral world. Laughter, an expression of Joy, has been shown by scholars, notably Raimundo and Whyte, in the collection of essays, *Laughter in Middle-earth*, to be important in Tolkien's works, and no character laughs more than Bombadil. Lastly, he is shown to be different from all living creatures: "a man, or so it seemed. At any rate he was too large and heavy for a hobbit, if not quite tall enough for one of the Big People." He does not fit into the category of man or hobbit nor dwarf or elf. Thus, we see that he is different; we must pay attention to why he is different. While other characters express joy at points during the quest, Bombadil is the most consistently joyous character. He is the nexus of joy in the story, joy that will be necessary for the hobbits to overcome evil and save Middle-earth and the Shire.

The hobbits' time with Bombadil is for them a very important refinement period in which they cross from the Shire and a joy in the natural, to the outside world that requires a focused joy like Bombadil's to survive and fight the darkness with the light of cheer. Once Frodo leaves the Old Forest, he will

officially be outside of the Shire, and thus Bombadil's home serves as a transition for Frodo and the other hobbits from what they are used to, to what is unexpected. Andrew Hallam discusses the meaning of thresholds and he argues that "[Bag End's front door] becomes a figure not of the truth of thresholds but of the literary *idea* of thresholds that can be used to signify all past and all future thresholds; it becomes the object for the philosophical contemplation of a threshold's meaning" (29). Bag End, Frodo's old home, could then be said to be a starting point for his journey. Just as this threshold is the starting point for Frodo's journey, Bombadil's home will be another threshold, but this time the threshold to the world outside of the safe, pastoral Shire. Ann McCauley Basso, too, sees Bombadil's home as a threshold: "The hobbits symbolically enter through the hedge gate into the Old Forest; in doing so they leave behind the 'normal' realm of The Shire and cross the threshold into the unknown" (141). Thus, meeting Bombadil was necessary for Frodo because, after leaving behind hobbit norms, he needed to learn what would be necessary to survive in the "unknown" outside world: joy.

The threshold of Bombadil's home is also important in the appearance of Goldberry. First, Basso tells us that "Goldberry paves the way for [the hobbits] to accept and appreciate spectacular female figures like Galadriel, Arwen, and Éowyn" (141). Some critics, such as Hargrove, argue that Goldberry is the Vala, Yavanna, but to do so, given the argument above that Bombadil is not Aulë, would be to try to see her as distinct from Bombadil. In fact, they should be considered together, a perfect example of the intimate sharing of joy. Goldberry shows us the joy found in fellowship and close, intimate relationships. Basso notices the marital joy of Bombadil and Goldberry: "Bombadil appears to be a good husband, and he and Goldberry seem to enjoy a happy marriage" (138). In both the Shire and Tom Bombadil's home, we see marriage as nature would have it: not a power struggle, but rather one of equality. Basso draws attention to Tolkien's view on marriage by drawing from one of Tolkien's letters. Tolkien says (concerning hobbit marriages), "[T]he government of a 'family', as of the real unit: the 'household', was not a monarchy (except by accident). It was a 'dyarchy', in which master and mistress had equal status, if different functions" (*Letters* 293, #214). Basso then says of this letter, "This formula seems to have extended beyond the borders of the Shire into the Old Forest as well, for Tom and his wife exhibit mutual consideration and respect. Bombadil's song focuses on Goldberry's appearance, but we soon learn that she is wise and perceptive as well" (138). So, if Tolkien considered hobbit marriages to be ones of equality, it would be right to follow this "formula" with Basso "beyond the borders of the Shire." Bombadil lives a humble, rustic lifestyle, but his joy is enhanced by the company of another, by the joy that love brings. We see Goldberry and Bombadil's mutual respect when we see how different they are, yet how

perfectly they work together. Bombadil returns from washing to help Goldberry get supper ready for the guests:

Then Tom and Goldberry set the table; and the hobbits sat half in wonder and half in laughter: so fair was the grace of Goldberry and so merry and odd the caperings of Tom. Yet in some fashion they seemed to weave a single dance, neither hindering the other, in and out of the room, and round about the table; and with great speed food and vessels and lights were set in order. (*LotR* I.7.131-32)

Basso says that, "[a]lthough by today's standards her behavior seems hopelessly outdated, Goldberry is, in many ways, quite typical of the 1950s homemaker" (138). Yet, Basso also uses this scene to show that "Goldberry's actions, along with Tom's, are more indicative of hospitality than of subservience" (139). Tom is "merry and odd," whereas Goldberry is fair and graceful, but both work together in preparation for their guests, inspiring "wonder" and "laughter" as an example of the joy of working in fellowship with another.

In addition, both inspire the same feelings of peace and joy in the hobbits. When Frodo first meets Goldberry, she tells him, "'Laugh and be merry!'" (*LotR* I.7.123). Laughter and merriment are the theme of the House of Tom Bombadil because of the foundation of joy that exists because of Goldberry's and Bombadil's love. Frodo says,

"Fair lady Goldberry!" [...] feeling his heart moved with a joy that he did not understand. He stood as he had at times stood enchanted by fair elven-voices; but the spell that was now laid upon him was different: less keen and lofty was the delight, but deeper and nearer to mortal heart; marvellous and yet not strange. (*LotR* I.7.123)

Goldberry, like Bombadil, inspires those around her with a joy that is "deeper and nearer to mortal heart" than the "lofty" joy of "fair elven-voices." This suggests, first, that Goldberry and Bombadil should not be considered as the Valar. They are not "lofty" but rather "nearer to mortal heart." Second, this suggests that Bombadil and Goldberry show the hobbits a joy that is "deeper and nearer to mortal heart," both "marvellous" and "not strange," because it derives its power in simplicity when one finds cheer in one's companions and one's current life, not desiring power or glory. Basso notes that "L. Eugene Startzman [...] calls Galadriel 'Goldberry's counterpart'" (142-43) and in agreement, she goes on to say that "[o]ther parallels between the two women include their musical ability [...]" (143). This "musical ability" is similar to Bombadil's need to always sing. Music, for Tolkien, indicates another expression of joy, like laughter and smiling, and it is a natural ability of the elves.

Yet, “the spell that was now laid upon [Frodo] was different” than the enchantment of the elves and Goldberry is different from Galadriel. She is the consort of the most joyful character in the story and represents the simple, yet profound joy of love and companionship.

To be successful on his quest, Frodo must accept the help of others, both male and female characters, and work with them in a unity similar to Goldberry and Bombadil. Frodo is first presented by the dilemma to accept the help of others when he is about to set out from the Shire from his house in Crickhollow, in Buckland. Frodo suggests he is going to leave on his own, but Sam, Merry, and Pippin will not hear of it. Sam says:

‘[Gandalf] has some sense, mind you; and when you said *go alone*, he said *no! take someone as you can trust*.’

‘But it does not seem that I can trust anyone,’ said Frodo.

Sam looked at him unhappily. ‘It all depends on what you want,’ put in Merry. ‘You can trust us to stick to you through thick and thin—to the bitter end. [...] But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone, and go off without a word. We are your friends, Frodo.’ (*LotR*, I.5.105)

From this passage we see the main issue that Frodo has: the inability to trust others, as Devin Brown points out as a possible cause for his isolation (168). Frodo must eventually learn he can trust others when he must work with the different races of Middle-earth at the Council of Elrond. Brown, describing Frodo’s quest for community, says that “Elrond gives Frodo no choice of traveling alone” (169) but it seems that something must have changed for Frodo to be more accepting of companions and to trust working with others, not just his friends. Brown says, “Another influence in bringing about the change we see in Frodo here may have been his visit to the house of Tom Bombadil. There he saw two very different people living together in harmony [...]” (172). Thus, Frodo learns from Bombadil and Goldberry that he must accept the help of others and accept the love of friends. He must not always work alone: a lesson that allows him to accept the help of the Fellowship and also to accept the help of Sam in the journey to Mount Doom. This lesson also allows Frodo to accept the needed help of Gollum, a most untrustworthy character. Bombadil and Goldberry taught Frodo the joy that lies within companionship. Tolkien took fellowship seriously, and as Bombadil and Goldberry teach this lesson in Tolkien’s work, we must view them as truly important.

Although the hobbits’ stay with Bombadil and Goldberry feels out of place and as a delay to the quest, yet it was an important time of transition for the hobbits. Klaus Jensen and Ruairidh MacDonald tell us that “Frodo, therefore, must travel into the ‘other’ world of faerie, there to [...] renew the link with the roots of his being, the childhood condition of himself and his people

and the childhood condition of the world about to be reborn" (38-9). This visit with Bombadil and Goldberry serves as a journey into the "world of faerie" in order to transition out of the Shire with the knowledge of what Middle-earth was like when it was yet young and a land of joy. Without the darkness of evil, Middle-earth, and its inhabitants, would be like children: taking joy in Creation and the pastoral world. The hobbits will take this knowledge and the joy they learned in Bombadil's home to create a rebirth of the world, a new world of peace and joy.

The hobbits also learn from Bombadil how joy takes away the terror of the Ring. Shippey tell us that "[The Ring] has to work through the agency of its possessors, and especially by picking out the weak points of their characters—possessiveness in Bilbo, fear in Frodo, patriotism in Boromir, pity in Gandalf" (142). Thus, the Ring can find a weak point in all characters, even Gandalf. That is why Gandalf resists Frodo's offer of the Ring with asperity. However, the Ring does not hold any power over Bombadil and his joy because he does not have any "weak points." During Frodo's talk with Bombadil at his home in the Old Forest, Frodo trusts Bombadil and finds himself giving Bombadil the Ring when he asks to see it. When Bombadil has the Ring, we see his ability to take away its terror:

[The Ring] seemed to grow larger as it lay for a moment on his big brown-skinned hand. Then suddenly he put it to his eye and laughed. For a second the hobbits had a vision, both comical and alarming, of his bright blue eye gleaming through a circle of gold. Then Tom put the Ring round the end of his little finger and held it up to the candlelight. For a moment the hobbits noticed nothing strange about this. Then they gasped. There was no sign of Tom disappearing!

Tom laughed again, and then he spun the Ring in the air—and it vanished with a flash. Frodo gave a cry—and Tom leaned forward and handed it back to him with a smile. (*LotR* I.7.132-133)

This scene is entirely one of comic joy. With the Ring, we have come to expect suspense and terror, yet here it is simply a "circle of gold" with no power to harm or control or influence one to evil. It is just a trinket, a toy to be played with by Bombadil. Treschow and Duckworth tell us that "[a]t this moment things fall suddenly into a new perspective. The Ring can lose its terror. Tom's simple goodness cannot be borne down by it, but bubbles up through and around it" (185). Bombadil's "simple goodness" allows him to be joyful and thus to resist evil. The Ring has no means to corrupt Bombadil. Therefore, it would be wrong of us not to admit that Bombadil has power and is a central representation of joy.

Additionally, Bombadil shows the hobbits the power of joy as a means of resisting evil. Raimundo shows us how laughter and smiles, expressions of joy, are a means for characters to resist the evil of the Ring. Raimundo describes Bombadil as “quite possibly the merriest soul alive” (77) and then says, “Tom’s excessive jubilation acts as a shield against the wiles of the Ring. And lest we say this power belongs to Tom Bombadil alone, the interplay of mirth and the Ring continues when Aragorn confronts the golden band. [...] Aragorn passes his test, and the Ring passes into safety once more” (77-8). Raimundo goes on to describe Galadriel’s laughter when she passes her test (78) along with Boromir’s smile before he dies (78) and Faramir’s laughter (78) as they both pass their test. She also describes Gandalf’s “jollity” (79) and how “Bilbo laughs to let go of the Ring” (77). From this evidence, we can see that joy is fundamental to Tolkien’s definition of resistance to evil. The Ring loses its power when faced with joy, as expressed in smiles and laughter that ultimately lead to peace. The hobbits must learn to hold onto joy to resist evil as they get closer to and eventually arrive in Mordor. Yet, we should re-examine Bombadil’s placement in this list. Raimundo says that Bombadil is “quite possibly the merriest soul alive” (77) and as such he should not be listed as simply another character who resists the Ring with a smile and laughter. Instead, he should be given the importance of one who is the epitome of joy in *The Lord of the Rings* who show the hobbits the power of expressing joy in the face of evil.

In addition, Tom Bombadil teaches the hobbits that joy gives discernment and allows one to see through evil to what lies beyond: light and peace. Surprisingly, Bombadil can see Frodo when he wears the Ring. While Bombadil is talking to the hobbits, Frodo uses the Ring. However, when Frodo attempts to leave the room Bombadil sees him. “‘Hey there!’ cried Tom, glancing towards him with a most seeing look in his shining eyes. ‘Hey! Come Frodo, there! Where be you a-going? Old Tom Bombadil’s not as blind as that yet’” (*LotR* I.7.133). Thus, Bombadil can see what others cannot see, and the Ring cannot hide anything from him. His eyes are “shining,” like he takes Frodo’s use of the Ring as a joke, which it certainly is not portrayed as elsewhere in the story. Bombadil teaches the hobbits to see beyond the wiles of Sauron, the wiles of despair, and look to the joy they feel in their native land, the Shire. This knowledge that the hobbits learn from Bombadil allows them to resist evil and become the hobbits they need to be to save the Shire and save Middle-earth.

When Frodo and the other hobbits finally leave Bombadil’s house and become trapped by the Barrow-wight, we see Bombadil’s power over darkness through the power of joy and cheer. It also shows his further importance to events later in the quest. Before the hobbits leave, Bombadil advises them not to go by the Barrows unless “[they] be strong folk with hearts that never falter” (*LotR* I.7.133-34). Bombadil, as if anticipating events, also tells them a song to

sing if they find themselves in danger (*LotR* I.7.134). A heart that “never falter[s]” would be one of joy. When a Barrow-wight captures Merry, Pippin, and Sam, Frodo is the last one left conscious and finds courage and thinks of Bombadil: like a remembrance of his constant joy, a remembrance that will recur later in the story. “In a small desperate voice he began: *Ho! Tom Bombadil!* And with that name his voice seemed to grow strong; it had a full and lively sound, and the dark chamber echoed as if to drum and trumpet” (I.8.142). This shows the power Bombadil’s name has in the natural world: the oppressing atmosphere of the barrow cannot keep Frodo from calling to Bombadil and finding courage to sing the song. After casting out the Barrow-wight and destroying its chamber, Bombadil wakes the three hobbits who had fallen under the wight’s spell singing, “*Wake now my merry lads! Wake and hear me calling!*” Then “the hobbits stirred, stretched their arms, rubbed their eyes, and then suddenly sprang up” (I.8.143). Tom is not only Master of nature and is able to cast out the Barrow-wight, but he also has the power to save the hobbits who are close to death, all while remaining cheerfully fearless in the face of peril. After that, Bombadil gives to the hobbits blades that “were forged many long years ago by Men of Westernessee: [...] foes of the Dark Lord, [until] they were overcome by the evil king of Carn Dûm in the Land of Angmar” (I.8.146). By giving the hobbits these blades, he gives Merry the means by which he will help destroy the Witch-king, the old king of Angmar. Thus, Bombadil saves the hobbits and leads them out of the Old Forest so they can continue their quest after having learned the light that joy can provide to resist the darkness of evil.

The purpose of the hobbits’ encounter with Bombadil is accepted as a time of preparation, but not fully developed to comment on its importance. Treschow and Duckworth tell us that the hobbits’ “interaction with [Bombadil] prepares them for the quest ahead” (182). Furthermore, they tell us

It may seem disconcerting that he laughs at them in their sense of distress and real plight. But he has done a great deal for them, and helped them on their way more than they are as yet aware. He has prepared them to go on. Like Beorn, he has taught them the way of things, indeed much more so. During their visit with him, their asylum of safety, as Shippey called it [...], he gives them a sense of the sweep of time, a sense of the story that they have been caught up in. He may not help advance the narrative, but he helps the hobbits (and the reader) see the shape and flow of the narrative that they have been caught up in. (183)

Bombadil’s joyousness and laughter may come across as dismissive or not taking the “plight” of the hobbits seriously. Perhaps that is why many critics feel uncomfortable with him. However, Treschow and Duckworth remind us that Bombadil provides comfort and preparation and, as Shippey reminds us, safety.



It is Bombadil's joy that gives the hobbits this sense of comfort and this reminder will help them succeed in their quest. Treschow and Duckworth also remind us that Bombadil gives the hobbits and the readers "a sense of the story that they [and we] have been caught up in." To understand this story, we must remember Raimundo's idea that "Goodness, that essential quality derived from a perspective larger than selfish gain and a realization of a higher story greater than our own, is the fount from which mirth's might flows" (84). Here, Treschow, Duckworth, and Raimundo help us see that Bombadil teaches the hobbits to have "a perspective larger than selfish gains" and to understand the "higher story" they are involved in. As Treschow and Duckworth tell us, this "'adventure on the way' [...] holds the main narrative back. That is its purpose. Certain things need to be made clear before the main narrative can get underway again" (180). Tolkien admired the pastoral, revered nature and Creation, and held Joy as a profound and sacred emotion. Through Bombadil, Tolkien makes joy's importance clear before he begins the narrative of the quest. The hobbits learn important lessons from Bombadil to shape their conception of joy and lead them to fearlessness and resistance to evil. Paul W. Lewis, Treschow, and Duckworth only see Bombadil as a character with a function similar to Beorn. Yet, Bombadil is much more than that. Gandalf is missing during the hobbits' first stages out of the Shire, so they rely on Bombadil. Like Gandalf, Bombadil teaches and hones the hobbits' characters to become what they will need to be on the quest.

Additionally, Bombadil is mentioned during the later narrative to continue to remind us of the importance of joy. When we come to the Council of Elrond, we see his place there as not only the oldest being in Middle-earth, but as a remembrance of the joy of peace and cheer. Shippey describes the Council of Elrond as an introduction to the different cultural groups of Middle-earth and a "dramatis[ed] ethical debate" (122) in which the story pauses and recommendations are given from each of the counsellors as to what will be needed to take their disparate fellowship of various cultures and succeed in destroying the Ring (117-22). Shippey says, "If Elrond's recommendation was courage, and Gandalf's hope, the dwarves' contribution to the ethical mix of the Council is a kind of unyielding scepticism" (121). Furthermore, he says that "[a]ny one of the counsellors in this chapter would bear similar analysis" (121). While not physically present, Bombadil is mentioned in the council and should be considered as one of the "counsellors." Elrond says,

Time was when a squirrel could go from tree to tree from what is now the Shire to Dunland west of Isengard. In those lands I journeyed once, and many things wild and strange I knew. But I had forgotten Bombadil, if indeed this is still the same that walked the woods and hills long ago,

and even then was older than old. That was not then his name. Iarwain Ben-adar we called him, oldest and fatherless. But many another name he has since been given by other folk. [...] He is a strange creature, but maybe I should have summoned him to our Council. (*LotR* II.2.265)

First, we see that, like Gandalf, Bombadil is given "many another name [...]" by other folk." Like Gandalf, Bombadil's true identity is hidden. Furthermore, Elrond describes Bombadil as "older than old" and as "oldest and fatherless." This further solidifies the idea that Bombadil is something that is both "strange" and different from all other living creatures in Middle-earth, something more out of place than even Elrond, who is part of Tolkien's larger mythology. Shippey and others describe Bombadil as a sort of Adam, to describe the title of "fatherless," but given the non-religious nature of Tolkien's mythology, it is more apt to see him simply as a character who knows the unique joy and peace of a time and land without Sauron or Morgoth and the despair they seek to bring. As such, he is a representative of joy.

Additionally, Elrond ponders whether he "should have summoned [Bombadil] to [the] Council." However, to Elrond's suggestion of inviting Bombadil to the council, Gandalf says,

He would not have come. [...] [T]he Ring has no power over him. He is his own master. But he cannot alter the Ring itself, nor break its power over others. And now he is withdrawn into a little land, within bounds that he has set, though none can see them, waiting perhaps for a change of days, and he will not step beyond them. (*LotR* II.2.265)

However, regardless of whether or not Bombadil would have come to the Council, it is important that Elrond would have considered inviting him as a "counsellor." As a result, he should be considered within Shippey's idea of being a representative or voice for a trait needed in order for the quest to be successful. As Shippey shows us that Gandalf recommends hope, Elrond courage, and the dwarves skepticism, now we must ask ourselves what would Bombadil have recommended if he were a counsellor? How could we analyze him? Given his sing-song, joyous, whimsical nature, and his fearlessness in the face of danger, it becomes clear that he would have recommended the trait of fearless joy in order for the quest to be successful.

Bombadil is mentioned again later in the quest when Sam remembers him when facing Shelob. The remembrance of Bombadil allows Sam to save Frodo and to save the quest from failure. This moment is similar to the Barrow-wight scene in which Frodo remembers Bombadil. Carol Jeffs argues, "[I]f Shelob is anyone's counterpart [...] it is Bombadil's" (26). Jeffs argues that Shelob is the dark and evil side of nature whereas Tom Bombadil is the good

side of nature (26). It makes sense that when faced by the most extreme case of natural evil, Sam thinks of the most extreme case of natural good: Bombadil. In Shelob's Lair, "[Sam] laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword; and as he did so, he thought of the darkness of the barrow whence it came. 'I wish old Tom was near us now!' he thought" (*LotR* IV.9.719). Sam is wishing for the joyfulness of Tom Bombadil that would lift anyone's spirits and which showed the hobbits that joy can take away the terror of darkness. Furthermore, Bombadil has taught Sam that joy is like a light to dispel the darkness. Before this scene, Frodo and Sam show that they learned Bombadil's lessons in their laughter in Cirith Ungol. Whyte describes this laughter and its significance when he says,

Along the desolate pass of Cirith Ungol, Frodo's laughter is unprecedented: "Such a sound had not been heard in those places since Sauron came to Middle-earth" [...]. Laughter is both an emblem of the inevitability of change and the survivability of good, and is itself in this case a new thing which brings a positive feeling to an evil place. [...] [L]aughter is hope. (52)

Bombadil has shown the hobbits the power of joy. As an expression of joy, Whyte's idea that "[l]aughter is both an emblem of the inevitability of change and the survivability of good" can also be applied to joy as a whole. Joy is an "emblem" of the ultimate victory of good and Bombadil is the central source of unfettered joy in the story. It is thus no surprise that Sam thinks of Bombadil when he is later alone and about to face Shelob. The world changes, but the joy and goodness of Bombadil has survived since the beginning of the world and it has been passed on to the hobbits. After thinking of the joy of Bombadil and joy's power to lighten the darkness, Sam then thinks of a literal light: the Phial of Galadriel. It is plausible to suppose that after thinking of the joy of Bombadil, Sam thought of Goldberry too, which may have reminded him of Galadriel and her Phial as well. Sam then uses the Phial of Galadriel to eventually defeat Shelob. Whereas before the hobbits required Bombadil's physical presence to overcome darkness and evil, now Sam only needs to remember Bombadil and his joy and he is able to defeat the darkness on his own, grimly holding onto Joy and hope. Thus, even though Bombadil is not physically present in the quest, his lessons are still remembered outside the Old Forest and fundamentally shape the outcome of the quest.

In addition, when the quest is over, when the world is at peace and full of joy, Gandalf wants to spend time with Bombadil, as a servant returning to a Master. On the return journey to the Shire, when Gandalf and the hobbits come to the spot where Bombadil left them at the beginning of their journey, Gandalf finally leaves them. He says, "I am going to have a long talk with Bombadil: such a talk as I have not had in all my time. He is a moss-gatherer, and I have been a

stone doomed to rolling. But my rolling days are ending, and now we shall have much to say to one another" (*LotR* VI.7.996). Throughout the story, Gandalf has been the character that everyone looked up to for advice and guidance. Yet, after all the events that have unfolded, Gandalf wishes to return and have with Bombadil "such a talk as [he has] not had in all [his] time," as if he is a servant returning to a Master. We begin to see how Bombadil "is *master* in a peculiar way" (*Letters* 192, #153). As the constant source of joy in the story, Bombadil is rightfully given Gandalf's respect and is his "*master* in a peculiar way" in that he seems so simple, so easy to dismiss, yet he is so important and powerful by always being cheerful in a way that seems impossible to a mortal or a Maia. Bombadil comments on the importance of cheer and joy to create a world of peace.

As a servant of joy, Gandalf, although at times stern, is still nonetheless full of joy. Pippin notices this when spending time with Gandalf in Minas Tirith:

Pippin glanced in some wonder at the face now close beside his own, for the sound of that laugh had been gay and merry. Yet in the wizard's face he saw at first only lines of care and sorrow; though as he looked more intently he perceived that under all there was a great joy: a fountain of mirth enough to set a kingdom laughing, were it to gush forth. (*LotR* V.1.759)

Raimundo, describing this scene, says,

Mirth is the expression of joy's confidence, and joy's confidence is bigger than oneself. It is the assurance that right will win, which was why Tolkien wrote, why his characters press on, why Bombadil tosses the Ring and Nienna weeps and Tulkas laughs and Rohan's swords sang as they slew. (85)

Gandalf knows "joy's confidence" well and is admired as a chief character in the story. Gandalf spends the majority of his leisure time in the Shire, a site of pastoral joy, amidst the joy of the hobbits. Now, when all is over, he will return to a "fountain of mirth" and joy that is more constant and plentiful than his own. Bombadil and Gandalf both had a hand in helping the hobbits become the characters they were meant to be, however Gandalf is admired by critics for his prominence in the narrative, whereas Bombadil is dismissed and his admiration from Gandalf is ignored. Instead, it should be noticed as representative of Bombadil's importance in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Before Thorin dies in *The Hobbit*, he tells Bilbo, "There is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some courage and some wisdom, blended in measure. If more of us valued food and cheer and song

above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world" (XVIII.302). Tom Bombadil is the physical representation of constant joy and a character who values cheer and song above all else. The hobbits, like Bilbo, have the correct values to create a "merrier world," but they must transform those values into a fearless joy that Bombadil teaches them. Many wonder if Bombadil belongs in *The Lord of the Rings*. Yet, Tolkien would not "have left him in if he did not have some kind of function" (*Letters* 178, #144) and now we can see that Bombadil's function is to be the nexus of joy and cheer and show the hobbits, the only characters with close contact with Bombadil other than Gandalf in the story, how to refine their joy to be successful on their quest to save Middle-earth. Furthermore, in Bombadil's joyful marriage with Goldberry, we see the importance of companionship and the sharing of joy. Tolkien's response, along with other members of the Inklings, to turn to joy amidst the doubt and despair caused by two world wars was unique among post-war authors. We are shown that no matter the darkness we face in our lives, we can find light and hope in cheerful companionships and in the expressions of Joy. Joy allows us to create the more peaceful, "merrier world" that Thorin envisions and Bombadil embodies.

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